

Christ's Once-for-All Sacrifice

Devotional Reading: Mark 10:41-45

Background Scripture: Hebrews 9:23-10:25

Hebrews 9:23-28

²³ It was necessary, then, for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these sacrifices, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. ²⁴ For Christ did not enter a sanctuary made with human hands that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence. ²⁵ Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own. ²⁶ Otherwise Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But he has appeared once for all at the culmination of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. ²⁷ Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, ²⁸ so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

Hebrews 10:1-4, 11-14, 19-25

¹ The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming—not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. ² Otherwise, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have

felt guilty for their sins. ³ But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins. ⁴ It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

¹¹ Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. ¹² But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, ¹³ and since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool. ¹⁴ For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.

¹⁹ Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰ by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, ²¹ and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²² let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. ²³ Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. ²⁴ And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, ²⁵ not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Key Text

Christ did not enter a sanctuary made with human hands that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence. —Hebrews 9:24

Unit 2: Christ's All-Sufficient Sacrifice

Lessons 6–9

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Identify how a person enters the holiest place.
2. Explain why Christ had to die only once.
3. Recruit an accountability partner for mutual encouragement in love and good works.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. Grandma's House
- B. Lesson Context

I. Absolute Necessity (Hebrews 9:23-28)

- A. Better Sacrifice (v. 23)
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- C. Better Priest (vv. 25-28)
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II. Weak Sacrifices (Hebrews 10:1-4)

- A. Repetition (vv. 1-2)
- B. Reminder (vv. 3-4)

III. Perfect Sacrifice (Hebrews 10:11-14)

- A. Christ's Service (vv. 11-12)
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IV. Implications (Hebrews 10:19-25)

- A. Reasons (vv. 19-21)
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Faithful in Assembling

Conclusion

- A. One Sacrifice
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Grandma's House

My grandmother kept a very tidy house. The floors were always spotless, and the carpets were free of stains. She exemplified the philosophy, "A place for everything, and everything in its place."

I also knew her as a wonderful playmate. She would chase my sister and me around outside. She would play with us in the pool or the mud, teaching us to experience the world with our hands.

But we couldn't enter her house while we were dirty. She had a shower outside by her pool, where we would wash off before going inside. We had to put on clean clothes and shoes. We knew Grandma loved us, but she needed to preserve her home. Her front door separated the earthy outside world from her pristine abode. Her threshold was a barrier that uncleanliness could not cross. Sound familiar?

B. Lesson Context

The book of Hebrews clarifies the relationship between the old and new covenants. Its original intended audience seems to have been Christians of Jewish heritage who were in danger of slipping back into Judaism. To address this issue, the unnamed author demonstrates how the regulations of the Law of Moses pointed to Christ and his work.

After identifying Christ as the high priest of the new covenant (Hebrews 4:14–5:10; 8:1-13), the author summarized the regulations for worship under the old covenant (9:1-7) and how those practices were not permanent (9:8-10). They have been superseded by the one-time sacrifice of Christ, the ultimate high priest (9:11-22). These details set the stage for the outstanding summary presented in chapters 9 and 10, the focus of today's text.

I. Absolute Necessity

(Hebrews 9:23-28)

A. Better Sacrifice (v. 23)

23. It was necessary, then, for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these sacrifices, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these.

The word *then* indicates that the writer is mov-

ing from establishing facts of Christ's blood atonement—the "What's so?"—to exploring the implications of those facts—the "So what?" The phrase *copies of the heavenly things* refers to things of earth with counterparts in Heaven. The need to use animal blood to purify various elements of the old covenant worship structures seems clear in Leviticus 16:15-19. But the second half of the verse at hand tells us that the *necessary* also applies to *the heavenly things themselves*. But if nothing sinful has come into contact with those heavenly things, why the need for purification?

Some students see a "lesser to the greater" logical argument as the solution. Such an argument says that if something is true for a thing of lesser importance, it must also be true for a thing of greater importance. The next verse provides insight into the author's assertion regarding the need to purify the heavenly things.

What Do You Think?

What "necessary" actions do you need to take now that Christ has completed his own "necessary" actions?

Digging Deeper

Would *justification* and *sanctification* be two good categories for your responses? Why, or why not?

B. Better Tabernacle (v. 24)

24. For Christ did not enter a sanctuary made with human hands that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence.

The word *for* implies that what follows explains or expands on the previous statement. Mortal high priests enter into a sanctuary made by human hands (contrast Acts 7:48). Christ, on the other hand, *entered heaven itself* at his ascension. There, he performed his priestly duties in the heavenly tabernacle, not in the replica on earth (see Hebrews 9:12). The author emphasizes a distinctive feature of Christ's heavenly ministry. The present tense *now* points to Christ's ongoing role in interceding for believers (see Romans 8:34; Hebrews 7:25). Contrary to mortal priests who

repeatedly offer sacrifices, Christ's single sacrifice has eternally settled the sin debt (see 7:27; 10:10). In this role, Jesus stands directly before God, without any veil separating him from the Father, conducting his priestly duties on our behalf.

C. Better Priest (vv. 25-28)

25. Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own.

This verse compares how Jesus' service differs from mortal high priests. The Law of Moses prescribes an annual Day of Atonement for addressing the people's sins (Leviticus 16:29-30; 23:26-32). Two goats were chosen, one for sacrifice to atone for sins and one for release into the wilderness as a scapegoat to carry off sins (16:7-10, 20-22). On the Day of Atonement and only on that day, *the high priest* would enter *the Most Holy Place* to set these procedures in motion (16:2, 34). This backdrop sets the stage for a great contrast, next.

26. Otherwise Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But he has appeared once for all at the culmination of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself.

Hebrews 7:27 makes much the same point that we see here. Both passages emphasize the uniqueness of Jesus' self-sacrifice. Rather than suffering *many times*, his sacrifice was one-time only. That's one reason it is superior to the sacrifices of mortal high priests. If his sacrifice were only as effective as that of animals, he would have had to die repeatedly *since the creation of the world*. The apostle Paul makes the same point: Christ's sacrificial death marks the transition from one era of history to another (1 Corinthians 10:11).

27-28. Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of

How to Say It

Judaism *Joo-duh-izz-um*
 or *Joo-day-izz-um.*
Nehemiah *Nee-huh-my-uh.*

many; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

The death sentence that all humans labor under was pronounced in Genesis 3:19. The writer's phrase *to die once* refers to physical death. There are some notable exceptions in that a handful of people in the Bible died twice physically: those whom Christ raised from the dead during his earthly ministry died again later. Contrary to humans, who were *destined* to die once, Jesus voluntarily sacrificed his life to settle the debt of sin. His death was a conscious act of self-sacrifice (see John 10:15-17).

The phrase *after that* sets the possibility of another death as a result of the *judgment* to come. No one will be exempt from this evaluation: "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ" (2 Corinthians 5:10). The result will be an eternal separation of forgiven sinners from unforgiven sinners (Daniel 12:2; Matthew 25:46; etc.). Some students propose that the two verses before us mean a person is judged immediately after death; others disagree. The author does not specify when the judgment occurs. The emphasis is on the fact that our "once" death sentence stands in parallel with Christ's *once* offered sacrifice *to take away the sins of many* (Isaiah 53:12). His return then will not be for paying for sins again, but for bringing in the promised salvation (Philippians 3:20; Titus 2:13).

What Do You Think?

What actions would you take if you knew this was your last day on earth?

Digging Deeper

How would or should those actions differ from your daily routine, if at all?

Once or Twice? Ready or Not?

An evangelist from yesteryear had a ready response when someone would ask him when his birthday was. He would respond with the simple question, "Which one?" After the then-confused person asked, "You've been born more than once?" the evangelist would reply, "Yes. If you're born once, you die twice; if you're born twice, you die once." This then served as a lead-in to discussing

the need to be born again (John 3:3, 7; 1 Peter 1:23) as the only way to escape the second death (Revelation 2:11; 20:6, 14; 21:8).

We live under Christ's directive of the great commission of Matthew 28:19-20. This directive brings the challenge to "be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have" (1 Peter 3:15). Time is short—death can come at any time to anyone. I know that I need to adopt a greater sense of urgency in that regard. Do you?
—R. L. N.

II. Weak Sacrifices

(Hebrews 10:1-4)

A. Repetition (vv. 1-2)

1. The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming—not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship.

The author of Hebrews continues to compare and contrast the realities of the old covenant with those of the new covenant. Having shown the superiority of Christ's priesthood, the author explains the superiority of Christ's sacrifice to animal sacrifices.

The phrase *the law* refers to the Law of Moses in this context, not law in general. Nothing was wrong with the Law of Moses regarding what it was intended to achieve (Romans 3:20; 7:7; etc.). Its holy value is in the facts that (1) God was its ultimate author and (2) as *a shadow of the good things that are coming*, the law points to certain future greater realities (compare Hebrews 8:5; 9:11). Those who accepted the first fact while missing the second fact were in danger of putting an unrealistic burden on others (Acts 15:1-35; Galatians 3:1-6; etc.).

The New Testament authors recognize the law's limited and distinct role in God's plan. The law was a temporary guardian meant to lead us to Christ (Galatians 3:23-25). The law's limited role means that it cannot *make perfect those who draw near* since no one has kept the law perfectly (Romans 3:9-20)—no one, that is, except for Christ.

What Do You Think?

How would you explain the concept of *foreshadowing* to someone in as few words as possible?

Digging Deeper

How would your explanations to unbelievers and new Christians differ? Why?

2. Otherwise, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins.

The word *otherwise* introduces a logical conclusion to the current argument regarding the limitations of the Law of Moses. Were the Law of Moses to have been God's "final word" to humanity, God would not have settled the sin issue *once* and *for all*. The animal sacrifices would need to continue forever. And since such sacrifices would need to be repeated indefinitely, they do not have the power to perfect God's people. Paul makes a similar argument about the law in Galatians 3:21, where he denies that righteousness comes through the law because God did not give a law capable of imparting eternal life.

B. Reminder (vv. 3-4)

3. But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins.

Instead of freeing the people from their guilt, the animal sacrifices of the Law of Moses had the opposite effect: they were *an annual reminder of sins*. The sacrifices highlighted sinfulness rather than fixing the problem of sinful hearts (again, Romans 3:20).

What Do You Think?

In what ways could your congregation regularly and appropriately remind its members of the reality of sin?

Digging Deeper

What steps do you need to take to remind yourself of individual sins? of corporate sins?

4. It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

This verse highlights the main limitation of animal sacrifices. Given that God commanded the animal sacrifices, it may seem strange that the author of Hebrews denies that they *take away sins*. After all, do not Leviticus 16:10 and Numbers 29:11 say that the two goats make "atonement"? But notice again their temporary nature. It's "wash, rinse, repeat" indefinitely.

III. Perfect Sacrifice

(Hebrews 10:11-14)

A. Christ's Service (vv. 11-12)

11. Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins.

The author continues to draw together the threads of the argument. He does so here by first describing the duties of *every priest*. Under the old covenant, a priest's work was never done. He would perform the same rituals and sacrifices repetitively. The blood offerings he would make were categorized in various ways: the sin offering (Leviticus 4:1-35; 6:24-30); the guilt offering (5:14-6:7); the burnt offering (1:3-17); and the fellowship offering (3:1-17). The bloodless offerings were the grain offering (2:1-16) and the drink offering (23:13). None of these rituals or sacrifices could ultimately remove the people's sins. The contrast comes next.

12. But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God,

By contrast, Christ's priestly service required only a single offering: himself. He offered this sacrifice one time for the sins of humanity. At that point, his duties were completed, and he took his rightful seat at God's *right hand*. The writer of Hebrews draws on Psalm 110:1 to affirm Jesus in this position. By the time we get to this point in the book of Hebrews, the writer has already pointed to this psalm three times (Hebrews 1:3, 13; 8:1). The use here implies that the Son's sacrifice is completely satisfactory, never needing to be repeated. He will remain seated until his second appearing (9:28; a notable exception is Acts 7:55-56).



Step out of the shadow and into Jesus' redemptive light.

Visual for Lesson 6. Display this visual as you ask learners for examples of situations when Jesus' redemption changed something for the better.

B. Christ's Rest (vv. 13-14)

13. and since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool.

This verse continues the quotation of Psalm 110:1. The idea seems to be one of rest now that Christ's work on the cross is completed. He offers no more sacrifices. Instead, he occupies a seat of honor while his Father works to make every knee bow to Christ and every tongue confess that he is Lord (Philippians 2:9-1).

14. For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.

This verse concludes the argument that the author has been making. The numerous animal sacrifices of the old covenant have given way to Christ's *one sacrifice*. This is the offering by which people may be *made perfect*, not by the animal sacrifices of the Law of Moses. The people being perfected by Christ are also referred to as *those who are being made holy*. To be made holy or set apart is to be sanctified, and there are two aspects to this.

IV. Implications

(Hebrews 10:19-25)

A. Reasons (vv. 19-21)

19. Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus,

Our last section sketches the implications of Jesus' priestly work. According to Leviticus 16, only

the high priest could enter the Most Holy Place, the dwelling place of God's presence in the tabernacle and temple. This access was only allowed once a year. Because Jesus' sacrifice completely satisfied the penalty for sin that we owed, we can each have access to God that was unthinkable before (compare Ephesians 2:18; Hebrews 4:16; 9:8, 12, 25). Regarding the *confidence* that we now have to *enter the Most Holy Place*, see also 10:35; and 1 John 5:14.

20. by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body,

The *new and living way* distinguishes the new covenant from the old one. This way is "new" because it was inaccessible before Christ offered himself as a sacrifice. This way is also "living," which means it gives life to those who follow it.

By his self-sacrifice, Jesus has *opened* a path for us *through the curtain of his body*. When his body was torn to death by nails on the cross, the curtain in the temple was torn at the same time (Matthew 27:51). The link becomes more evident if the veil is understood not as a barrier but as the threshold that separated the Most Holy Place from the outer world. Similarly, Christ's body broken on our behalf is the door that leads into God's presence (John 14:6).

21. and since we have a great priest over the house of God,

The author provides a statement of fact that gives the reason for the imperative of the next verse. Before we go there, however, we take a minute to examine the designation *the house of God*. That was a title for the Jerusalem temple, especially after the return from Babylonian exile (examples: Ezra 3:8; Nehemiah 11:11). But the author of Hebrews uses the designation to refer to people who constitute the church (Hebrews 3:6).

B. Exhortation (vv. 22-25)

22. let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.

This is the resulting imperative; this is what we are to do *with a sincere heart* and *with the full assurance that faith brings*—an imperative echoed in var-

ious ways elsewhere (Romans 8:15-17; Galatians 4:6; Colossians 2:2; Hebrews 6:11; 1 John 5:13). The imagery of *hearts sprinkled* and *bodies washed* may have its basis in Ezekiel 36:25. See also the image of sprinkled blood in Hebrews 12:24 and cleansing in 9:14. The inner cleansing of the heart is matched also by the outer cleansing *with pure water*, which likely refers to baptism.

The Greek word translated *conscience* occurs 30 times in the New Testament. The word occurs in a positive sense (example: Acts 23:1), in a “weak” sense (example: 1 Corinthians 8:7), and in a decidedly negative sense (example: Romans 2:15). Our conscience was given to us by God to be a moral guide, but humans are adept at modifying their conscience toward evil (1 Timothy 4:2; Titus 1:15).

23. Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.

The verb *hold unswervingly* denotes consistency in adhering to the professed faith. The ability of God’s people to be faithful is based on God’s faithfulness to uphold his promises. His faithfulness is beyond question (1 Corinthians 1:9; Hebrews 3:6).

24-25. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

These two verses are logically connected. Think about it: wouldn’t it be almost impossible to encourage *one another on toward love and good deeds* unless we are in the habit of *meeting together*? That’s the context of supporting each other (Acts 2:42-47).

What Do You Think?

What steps will you take to ensure you are still gathering with other believers during life’s busy season?

Digging Deeper

How will you ensure that those gatherings are opportunities for encouragement and accountability?

Faithful in Assembling

Pete was an older man who only had one leg. He used crutches and a wheelchair but was at church

every Sunday. Harriett was a friend’s grandmother who taught the junior girls’ class. At times, she let us take turns teaching the class. I hope she lived long enough to hear that many of us followed her example by teaching children at our churches. Bill taught the high school Sunday school class every week. He made us laugh, and we loved him.

You may be thinking, *But things were different back then. After all, don’t we now have the option of attending church virtually through the live streaming of our services?* Pete, Harriett, and Bill were just some of the people I knew growing up in our church. They were faithful in meeting with other Christians every week. Their love and encouragement spurred me and others on to lives of service for God. Who is someone whose service in the church encouraged you? How will you be an encouragement in your congregation? —L. J. N.

Conclusion

A. One Sacrifice

Most people in the ancient Greco-Roman world believed that their gods were remote and cared little for them. Some Jewish people of the time between the Testaments also viewed God as distant, so they developed (imagined) elaborate systems of angels to bridge the gap between God and humanity. It is easy for us to believe that God is distant. His silence can lead us to think he doesn’t care about us.

But such a belief is proven false when we consider the actions of Jesus, our great high priest. He put on flesh and came to earth to offer himself as a sacrifice for our sins—those aren’t the actions of a “distant” God!

The next time you feel distant from God, perhaps ask yourself is: *Which of us moved?*

B. Prayer

Father, thank you for giving us a faithful high priest, your Son, Jesus. Give us the courage to approach you with the boldness Jesus purchased for us. We pray in his name. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Jesus opened the Most Holy Place to us.